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**BILL FINCH**  
Mayor

**TESTIMONY OF THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT**

**TO THE**

**EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2012**

**RE: S.B. 24 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS**

The City of Bridgeport urges your support to SB: 24 An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness.

Several years ago, I traveled to New York to visit Geoffrey Canada of the Harlem Children's zone. During that meeting he told me that education is the Civil Rights issue of this generation. I wholeheartedly agree.

Connecticut's current education system is inadequate and cannot fulfill our obligation to provide our children with the opportunity to succeed. Fewer children from Bridgeport and many of the State's other urban centers have the necessary skills to succeed in college or to match the needs of Connecticut's employers. We need a new vision for our children which can only come from an overhaul of our current education system. I believe the Governor's bill is critical to the beginning of treating all Connecticut children equally.

As we began to have these conversations on school reform, all decisions should be based on the simplest premise of all – What is best for the children?

Reform in our education system is imperative and I am committed to bringing about change to increase test scores, college and trade school entrance and reduce our dropout rate. However, in order to accomplish many of my goals, I need you to support the Governor's Education proposal to give my children a fighting chance to compete in a globally competitive workforce.

I support the Governor's efforts in education reform and would like to highlight a few of his proposals that I believe are fundamental to reforming our system.

- Enhance families access to early childhood education
- State support and intervention in low - performing schools
- Expand the availability of high quality school models, including traditional schools, magnets and charters.
- Ensure that our schools are home to the very best teachers and principals – working within a fair system that values their skill and effectiveness over seniority and tenure.

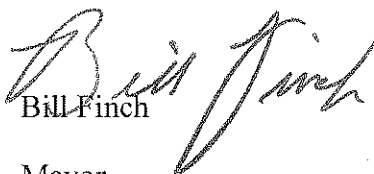
Additionally, I would like education reform in our state to also include:

- **Parental choice** – We must allow parents to decide which is the best school for their children.
- **Reform the formula for school funding** - The state's existing education cost-sharing formula is an unfair system that depends too much on regressive local property taxes to support school spending. This system has led to inequity among school systems and widening the state's achievement gap.
- **Acknowledgement of where funds come from:** The current system disproportionately taxes the working poor. The current system is most unfair to Bridgeport, whose taxbase is 83% residential and only 17% commercial or industrial. Other cities are as much as 40% commercial and industrial. An increase in State funding and a commitment to Pre K – 12 public education will help Connecticut to compete economically with its neighbors and the world.

As the parent of two public school students in Bridgeport, one of the lowest performing districts with the highest concentration of failing schools in the State, I will continue to passionately fight the inequality in education. I stand ready and willing to work with the State, so that we may someday be able to look ourselves in the mirror and say each child has an equal opportunity to succeed. In balance, bills should be passed but this should not be our final step in this fight. Much more is needed to bring equality to our state.

I thank you for addressing this issue and for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony on this important reform effort.

Sincere Regards,

  
Bill Finch

Mayor